Diploma Programme
Programme du diplôme
Programa del Diploma

Markscheme

November 2018

Psychology

Higher level

Paper 3

6 pages

Paper 3 markbands

Marks Level descriptor

Marks	Level descriptor
0	The answer does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.
1–3	There is an attempt to answer the question, but knowledge and understanding is limited, often inaccurate, or of marginal relevance to the question. The response makes no direct reference to the stimulus material or relies too heavily on quotations from the text.
4–7	The question is partially answered. Knowledge and understanding is accurate but limited. Either the command term is not effectively addressed or the response is not sufficiently explicit in answering the question. The response makes limited use of the stimulus material.
8–10	The question is answered in a focused and effective manner and meets the demands of the command term. The answer is supported by appropriate and accurate knowledge and understanding of qualitative research methodology. The response demonstrates a critical understanding of qualitative research methodology applied to the stimulus material.

1. Evaluate the purposive sampling technique used in this study. **[10]**

Refer to the paper 3 markbands when awarding marks.

The command term "evaluate" requires candidates to make an appraisal by weighing up the strengths and limitations of the sampling technique used in the study. Although a discussion of both strengths and limitations is required, it does not have to be evenly balanced to gain high marks.

Responses that use the term "experiment" as a generic term for "study" should not be penalized.

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique often used in qualitative research to serve a specific research aim. It is up to the researcher's judgment to decide what characteristics are important to meet the purpose of the study. In this study, the researcher chose participants who were similar on salient characteristics, that is, the target population was "elderly dog owners".

Strengths of the purposive sampling method could include, but are not limited to:

- The participants accurately represent the topic under investigation because they are selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the research in order to provide rich data. For example, the participants were chosen because they owned a dog and were elderly, which fitted perfectly with the aim of this study, which opened up a new research area.
- It is relatively easy to select a sample once the selection criteria are clear. The sample can be supplemented with more participants during the research if necessary, e.g. using snowball sampling. In this study, the 24 participants were found in places where you would expect to meet dog owners.
- With purposive sampling you can gain insight into people's subjective beliefs about dog ownership and how that relates to their behaviour and wellbeing. For example, some participants referred to how they were "motivated to walk the dog even when they were in ill health" or that "the dog helped them when they felt depressed or lonely".

Limitations of the purposive sampling method could include, but are not limited to:

- The selection criteria used by the researcher are related to the overall topic of the study and could be subjective and biased. However, if the sampling process is based on objective criteria, documented and explained, bias can be reduced. In this explorative study, the researchers had chosen "elderly dog owners" as a target population in order to investigate potential benefits of dog ownership for the elderly. There may be potential biases in the selection process; for example, it could be assumed that dog owners were generally healthier and fitter than other people of the same age so the researchers must be attentive to whether or not they could apply the findings outside the actual sample.
- The sample may not be representative outside the target population because it is based on specific criteria, so it is difficult to generalize. However, this is less important in a qualitative study such as this explorative study because the focus is on how these particular participants experience potential health benefits of owning a dog and the data gathered could be used to make further research in the area under investigation.

Candidates may refer to other sampling methods but this should only be credited if it is done as part of their evaluation of the purposive sampling method used in this study.

Responses that refer to only strengths or only limitations of the purposive sampling method used in this study should be awarded up to a maximum of **[5]**.

Responses that evaluate only a sampling method other than the purposive sampling method used in the study should be awarded **[0]**.

2. Describe how researchers in this study used inductive content analysis (thematic analysis) on the interview transcripts. **[10]**

Refer to the paper 3 markbands when awarding marks.

The command term “describe” requires candidates to give a detailed account of how inductive content analysis was applied to the interview transcripts in the study.

Responses that use the term “experiment” as a generic term for “study” should not be penalized.

Candidates should describe characteristics or features of the procedure of inductive content analysis on the transcript in the context of this study. Relevant parts of the procedure of inductive content analysis in this study include, but are not limited to:

- Reading and rereading the transcripts of the focus group interviews to identify possible categories or themes (coding the raw data) that relate to how participants believe they benefit from having a dog.
- After a systematic analysis of the transcript and coding of data in terms of emerging themes (for example, "walking the dog is good for my health" or "socializing with other dog walkers helps me feel part of a group", the researcher could try to connect emerging themes in meaningful ways to establish low-level and higher-level themes and connect them in meaningful ways to establish possible hierarchies of themes.
- Constructing a summary table of the three higher-order themes mentioned in the stimulus material (physical benefits, psychological benefits, and social benefits) and connecting them to lower-level themes.
- Adding relevant quotations from participants in the study to support the choice of each theme. For example, for physical benefits some participants said “they were motivated to walk, even when in ill health”. When discussing psychological benefits some participants said “the dog gave them comfort and companionship.”
- Analysis of the transcripts will continue until saturation of the data.
- The final task is to make interpretations based on the summary table in order to find a relationship between the different themes and support this with relevant quotations from the participants.
- Finally, the researcher could attempt formulation of theory based on the analysis.
- Credibility checks can take place during the whole process of inductive content analysis, for example checking themes with other coders or researchers as well as participants to have them confirm the interpretation of data. Credibility checks could also include reflexivity, that is, the researcher controls for own biases.

Responses that merely identify themes but do not describe the process of inductive content analysis should be awarded up to a maximum of up to **[3]**.

Responses that merely quote themes mentioned in the stimulus material but fail to describe any elements of the process of inductive content analysis should be awarded **[0]**.

Responses that merely state that inductive content analysis is concerned with finding themes in the transcripts but fail to describe any elements of the process of inductive content analysis should be awarded **[0]**.

3. Discuss the use of focus group interviews in this study. **[10]**

Refer to the paper 3 markbands when awarding marks.

The command term "discuss" requires candidates to offer a considered review of factors relevant for the use of focus group interviews in this study.

Responses that use the term "experiment" as a generic term for "study" should not be penalized.

A focus group interview is a discussion guided by a facilitator. The group discussion is carefully planned to create a positive environment in which participants are free to talk openly. In this way, they are encouraged to express their attitudes on the topic under investigation. Focus group interviews are often used in research studies where the aim is to explore a specific problem in more depth and to guide future action. This is also the case in this study, which is focused on a specific age group and a new research area into potential health benefits for the elderly of owning a dog. Participants interact with each other during the focus group interview as they would in real life and this contributes to rich data.

Discussion points could include but are not limited to:

- The focus group allows for a flexible approach to the topic under investigation. The researcher can prepare a list of topics and questions to ask in advance and use them as a guide but they can be adjusted if necessary. In this study, some participants revealed that their dog was a source of comfort when they lost their partner. This topic was probably not planned by the researcher but could be further explored now that it was mentioned during the group discussion.
- In focus groups, participants can use their own language and they can discuss and respond to each other's statements. This gives a special dynamic to the interview and generates rich data. Normally, a focus group interview is considered to be higher in ecological validity because of its conversational nature. In the context of this study, members of the focus group could perhaps stimulate new thoughts on potential benefits of dog ownership that would not have occurred otherwise.
- Candidates may compare the focus group interview to alternative interview methods. For example, the focus group interview gave the researchers an opportunity to explore a number of opinions at the same time. This could save time compared to conducting individual interviews.
- Conformity might occur in a focus group interview as well as social desirability effects but a skilled facilitator will be attentive to this.
- Confidentiality/anonymity is very difficult if not impossible to obtain when a focus group interview is chosen but it can be justified if the topic under investigation is not particularly sensitive as in this study.